

Open Space and Habitat Commission Minutes
Monday, February 5, 2024
Community Chambers Conference Room, 23 Russell Boulevard, 6:30 p.m.

Commissioners Present:	Ramiro Cabanillas-Ledesma, Sara Geonczy, Patrick Huber (Chair), Marc Vayssieres (Vice Chair)
Vacant Positions:	One Regular Member, One Alternate Member
Commissioners Absent:	Lindsay Correa, Emma Torbert
Assigned Staff:	Tracie Reynolds, Manager, Open Space Program
Council Liaison:	Josh Chapman (Regular), Bapu Vaitla (Alternate)

1. Call to Order & Roll Call

Commissioner Huber opened the meeting after a quorum was achieved and did introductions.

2. Approval of Agenda

Commissioner Vayssieres made a motion to approve the agenda and it was seconded by Commissioner Cabanillas-Ledesma. The Commission voted 4-0-2-0 to approve the motion (Ayes – Cabanillas-Ledesma, Huber, Geonczy, Vayssieres; Noes – None; Absent – Correa, Torbert; Abstentions – None).

3. Brief Announcements from Staff, Commissioners, and Council Liaisons

Tracie Reynolds, staff liaison to the Commission, updated the Commission on several acquisition efforts that are underway. First, she said the conservation easement on the Gill Orchard #2 property should close by the end of the month. Second, negotiations with the property owner selling land east of South Fork Preserve are ongoing, she said. Third, staff hopes to apply for a state grant this year to purchase a conservation easement on the Billie’s Farm property, she said, after the property owner decides what land she wants excluded from the easement. Fourth, staff received permission from the City Council to submit an application to the Yolo Habitat Conservancy for a habitat conservation easement on the City’s Los Rios properties, she said. And fifth, she said the Solano Land Trust was still working with the owner of El Molino Farm to finalize the easement language and appraisal.

In addition, she said the City had settled on a final design for the circular sign for designating a City open space area. The final design incorporated comments received from the Commission, as well as feedback from the City Manager’s Office and the City communications team, she said. Also, she said she met again with the Friends of North Davis Ponds to discuss draft interpretive panels for the North Davis Upland Habitat Area and has revised the drafts again based on their feedback. Once the final drafts are completed by the City’s outside consultant, she said she would bring them back to the Commission again for feedback.

Finally, she said the City Clerk’s Office was not recruiting for new commission members right now, so the Commission would have to conduct its business with six members for the time being. She said recruitment should resume once the City Council provides the City Clerk’s Office with direction about the number and structure of commissions. The Commission was notified that the City Council would be discussing this issue on January 30, she said. The City Council for the most part approved the Council subcommittee’s recommended reorganization, she said. No changes were proposed for the Open Space and Habitat Commission, she said. Mayor Josh Chapman said the subcommittee was now going to refine the authorizing resolutions of all the commissions. He said he believed the City Clerk’s Office could resume recruitments for the commissions that are not going to change.

Mayor Chapman also said the commission reorganization was geared toward aligning the commissions with subject areas related to the upcoming General Plan update. He said the City Council will be looking to the commissions to outreach to the community and gather feedback in each subject area. That information will then guide and inform the General Plan update, he said. He said the City Council was going to kick-off this process on February 20. Commissioner Huber said the General Plan update will be a big task for the Commission in coming months.

4. Public Comment

Hiram Jackson, a Board of Education Trustee for the Davis Joint Unified School District, urged the Commission to vote in favor of Measure N which will be on the ballot in March. He said Measure N would continue the education parcel tax that funds programs in reading, writing, science, technology, engineering and math, and art and music in Davis schools.

Alan Hirsch, a community member, urged the Commission to voice their concern to the City Council about a perceived lack of outreach related to the City Council's commission reorganization plan. He said the plan to merge and eliminate some commissions was not adequately discussed with the affected commissions and the public at large.

5. Consent Calendar

Approval of the December 2023 meeting minutes was on the consent calendar. Commissioner Cabanillas-Ledesma made a motion to approve the minutes and it was seconded by Commissioner Vayssieres. The Commission voted 4-0-2-0 to approve the motion (Ayes – Cabanillas-Ledesma, Huber, Geonczy, Vayssieres; Noes – None; Absent – Correa, Torbert; Abstentions – None).

6. Regular Items

Discussion Item – Discuss and provide input on three draft design concepts for a wetlands habitat restoration project on 32 acres of land along the South Fork of Putah Creek owned by UC Davis

Ms. Reynolds said that, over the last 10 months, the City and UC Davis staff have been working with ICF, the City's outside consultant, to develop three draft design concepts for this wetlands habitat restoration project. She said the Commission was not being asked to choose a preferred concept or rank the concepts. Instead, staff was asking the Commission for feedback on all the various features of all three concepts, she said. The final design concept can be an amalgamation of the elements featured in all three concepts, she said. A larger community meeting in Davis is scheduled for March 13 and a third community meeting will be held on the UC Davis campus in April, she said.

The three design concepts were informed by input from a science advisory group organized by UC Davis and three community meetings that were held at the site in 2022, she said. All three design concepts would greatly expand the open water and riparian habitats on the site, she said, and replace the ruderal grassland/eucalyptus trees with more valuable types of habitat. The concepts, she said, seek to balance high-quality habitat with public access. Each attempts to naturally encourage the creek to meander with large woody debris piles, she said. Each also has trails that link with adjacent public trails and densely vegetated buffers adjacent to private property, she said. She said the cost to construct and maintain each of these concepts was not known at this time.

Andrew Fulks, Director of UC Davis's Putah Creek Riparian Reserve, and Nick Deyo, a landscape architect with ICF, then described in detail the various habitat features and public access features of

the three design concepts: (1) a perennial side channel concept, (2) a perennial side channel concept and backwater lagoon concept, and (3) a high-flow swale and backwater alcove concept.

Commissioner Huber then asked if Commissioners had any clarifying questions. Commissioners asked for clarification on (1) the rationale behind the location of the pedestrian bridges, (2) how often the site would be inundated with water, and (3) what features potential grant funders might prefer. Commissioner Huber then took public comment. There was no public comment. Commissioner Huber then closed public comment. The Commission then discussed the draft designs and provided feedback. Commissioners cited large amounts of open water, fishing access, and the large and small pedestrian bridges as the most compelling features. No action was taken.

Action Item – Elect chair and vice chair for 2024

Commissioner Huber said given the upcoming update of the General Plan it perhaps made sense for someone experienced to serve as chair. He said he enjoyed being chair and would be willing to serve as chair for another year, but he also said he wanted to give others a chance to be chair if someone wanted to be. Commissioner Vayssieres said he was also willing to continue serving as vice chair. No other Commissioners expressed an interest in serving as chair or vice chair.

Commissioner Huber then took public comment. There was no public comment. Commissioner Huber then closed public comment. Commissioner Cabanillas-Ledesma then made the following motion, which was seconded by Commissioner Geonczy: *“The Open Space and Habitat Commission nominates Commissioner Patrick Huber as chair and Commissioner Vayssieres as vice chair of the Commission for 2024.”* The motion passed by a 4-0-2-0 vote (Ayes – Cabanillas-Ledesma, Huber, Geonczy, Vayssieres; Noes – None; Absent – Correa, Torbert; Abstentions – None). Commission Huber continued serving as chair for the rest of the meeting.

7. Subcommittee and Liaison Assignment Updates

A. Liaison Assignments

- 1) *Lower Putah Creek Coordinating Committee (“LPCCC”)*. Commissioner Huber said the LPCCC had held public meetings in Winters and Davis to discuss with the community the need to manage water diversions along the creek. He said there was some confusion about what the LPCCC was expecting from the public. Also, some farmers felt that they were being blamed for taking too much water out of the creek, he said. The LPCCC will continue talking with farmers and landowners along the creek, he said.
- 2) *Yolo Habitat Conservancy (“YHC”)*. Commissioner Huber said there was nothing to report about the YHC’s implementation committee.

8. Long Range Calendar: Upcoming Meeting Dates and/or Potential Agenda Items

The next regularly scheduled meeting is Monday, March 4, 2024. Possible agenda items discussed included (1) a discussion of the proposed plant palette for the Nishi Student Apartments project, (2) a review of recent community engagement efforts on social media, (3) an introduction to the General Plan and a discussion of what the Commission’s role will be in updating it, and (4) a discussion of the City’s consultant report investigating options for the long-term management of the Davis wetlands.

9. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 8:26 p.m.